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LOCAL CAPACITY INITIATIVE IN THE LOWER MEKONG REGION

The U.S. Agency for International Development supports the Local Capacity Initiative project under the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to improve access to quality HIV services for key populations in Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam.

The three-year project (2015-2018) works to enhance national HIV responses in Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam through civil society engagement in policy advocacy. The project strengthens and empowers civil society organizations and places communities and populations most affected by HIV at the heart of advocacy and program activities. This project also works with community leaders living with HIV and in key populations at high risk of contracting HIV, including men who have sex with men, transgender people, sex workers and people who inject drugs.

NATIONAL HIV ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

The project supports a network of established civil society organizations from the region to build and strengthen their ability to effectively advocate host country government’s improved quality, accountability and performance of national HIV and AIDS programs in the Lower Mekong region. The lack of coordinated advocacy at the national level has constrained the ability of key populations to effectively shape policy. Priorities for national HIV advocacy are:

Thailand: Community-led HIV services, including HIV testing from lay providers (non-medical/clinical persons who perform clinical/medical procedures) to be legalized and integrated into the national AIDS

program, and increased accessibility of domestic funding for community organizations to engage in HIV prevention programming.

Lao PDR: Increased domestic funding for and improved accessibility of antiretroviral drugs and community-led HIV services, including lay provider HIV screening and/or testing, to be integrated and financed under the national AIDS program.

Vietnam: People living with HIV mobilized to engage with policy stakeholders and report challenges in accessing HIV services through Vietnamese social health insurance, and awareness created among people living with HIV on the importance of enrolling in social health insurance.

INVESTING IN COMMUNITY LEADERS

The project offers training to local civil society organizations in the three countries to identify barriers that restrict access of HIV health services among key populations and people living with HIV. The project provides ongoing support to professionally engage in collaborative dialogue with policymakers, ensuring that community voices can guide implementation of national HIV responses. Participants also learn to develop evidence-based policy briefs and other forms of written advocacy policy materials.

IMPACT AND RESULTS

Results are measured through evidence of local and regional civil society advocacy efforts and the improved capacity of local and regional civil society organizations. The project supports conducting organizational assessments, country situation analyses, advocacy training, advocacy campaigns, small grants and workshops on topics such as business plan development and grant writing, and promoting programmatic and biomedical advances to help end AIDS.

PARTNERS

The Local Capacity Initiative is implemented by Raks Thai Foundation and its partners, including civil society organizations that provide training on advocacy and organizational development to other civil society organizations in Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. These partners include: the Foundation for AIDS Rights in Thailand, Lao Positive Health Association in Lao PDR and the Vietnam Network of People Living with HIV.

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